



NEWS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation

Las Vegas Field Office

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LAST RENO TAX REFUND FRAUD SCHEME MEMBER SENTENCED

RENO – A woman from the Oakland area is the last of four to be sentenced in a scheme that defrauded the United States Government out of \$973,521 in fraudulent tax refunds announced John Collins Special Agent in Charge of IRS-Criminal Investigation Las Vegas Field Office.

Claudette Ward 27 was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Robert C. Jones to six months in prison, 3 years of supervised release and ordered to pay restitution of \$77,000 to the IRS, for her guilty plea of conspiring with others to file false tax returns in the names of others.

The other conspirators sentenced earlier by U.S. District Judge Robert C. Jones include Sabrina Brown 37 from Oakland, Ca sentenced last September to four months in prison, two years supervised release and ordered to pay restitution of \$8,416 and Tamika Centers 37 also from Oakland, Ca sentenced last December to two months in prison, two years supervised release and ordered to pay \$18,300 in restitution. Chante Taylor 42, from Reno, who was considered the ringleader in the conspiracy, was sentenced last October to 42 months in prison; 3 years supervised release and ordered to pay \$542,921.06 in restitution.

"IRS Criminal Investigation has made investigating refund fraud and identity theft a top priority" said Special Agent in Charge, John Collins. "Filing fraudulent tax returns in the names of other individuals may result in significant harm to those individuals whose identities were stolen, as well as a monetary loss against the U.S. Treasury. IRS Criminal Investigation will continue to vigorously pursue those who unjustly enrich themselves by preparing false claims for refunds."

According to the plea agreement Claudette Ward, Sabrina Brown and Tamika Centers provided Chante Taylor with personal identifying information of individuals (not themselves), such as names and Social Security Numbers. The purpose of providing this information was to use it to prepare false individual income tax returns for these individuals. At least some of the personal identifying information was stolen or taken from the individuals to whom it belonged without their knowledge.

After receiving this information Chante Taylor would prepare false W2 forms for these individuals from employers who did not employ them. Taylor would then prepare false income tax returns for these individuals requesting false tax refunds from the IRS. Taylor electronically filed



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at least 129 fraudulent returns for the tax years 2008, 2009 and 2010. As a result of these returns and claimed refunds, the IRS processed these false returns as if they were legitimate and issued refunds in most instances.

Taylor provided the routing numbers and bank account numbers of various bank accounts and prepaid cards held in her name, the defendant's name, and/or the other co-defendants' names. This caused the IRS to deposit the fraudulently obtained refunds into these accounts and onto those prepaid debit cards. Taylor would withdraw the monies and split the proceeds with the other defendants.

The case was investigated by the IRS Criminal Investigation and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Carla B. Higginbotham.

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